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In April, when the sap rises, the Gros Ventres scraped the juice from the inner bark peeled from cottonwood and sometimes even from box-elder. They also chewed the gum from pines. Infusions of cherry bark or roots and peppermint were said to have been drunk as tea, but such concoctions were considered usually more in the nature of medicines.

So long as the Gros Ventres had the buffalo, relatively little in the way of foodstuffs from the white man were imported. Sugar, flour, occasional fresh fruits, coffee and tea were known and used to some extent after about 1855.[10] The possibility of obtaining whiskey, was, however, one of the items which determined the popularity of a given trading place. Incidentally, tobacco was an important item of trade after 1800, although prior to that time the Gros Ventres had raised their own.[11]

Clothing and Adornment

The importance of the buffalo in the economy of the Gros Ventres was as obvious in clothing and in shelter as it was in food. The buffalo robe, dressed with the hair on, was perhaps the most valuable article inasmuch as it was not only a regular part of their garb, but also was the main article of trade with the whites after about 1830. When decorated, it had high prestige value as a gift.

Seldom was the hide of a buffalo older than two years used for robes since the fur of those of greater age was usually scabby even in the fall when the coats were in best condition. It required the skin of a yearling to make a robe for a twelve-year-old, and the skins of calves made robes for smaller children. When the demand of the trade for robes was very great, the large wool blanket sometimes replaced the robe for wearing apparel and for bedding.

Most of the other articles of clothing were made from well-dressed deer, elk and antelope skins.[12] Deer and elk were more

[10] See p. 22.

[11] This tradition is confirmed by Cocking in 1772, who writes, p. 111, "The tobacco they use is their own planting which hath disagreable flavor. I have preserved a specimen." Kroeber's informants denied knowledge of the tradition.

[12] In 1854 Denig, pp. 464–65, describes the cloth bought for clothing for summer and fall wear, but states that a real hunter must have a buffalo robe, moccasins, mittens, cap, skin leggings and an extra buffalo robe.

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At this late date it was difficult to obtain in the field details of exchange between the Gros Ventres and the white traders. One such transaction was recalled clearly by Coming Daylight, who remembered it because the amount given in return was relatively large. On this occasion, for 12 buffalo robes, the Gros Ventres received 2 striped blankets, 1 whole sack of sugar, 1 horse. If we compare with Denig's figures for a typical exchange in the 1850's where a horse was worth 10 robes, and 1 white, 3-point blanket was the equivalent of 3 robes,[14] we can agree that this was a good bargain. The same informant, however, remembers another occasion on which she herself gave the robe off her back to a trader in return for some apples which her little daughter craved. We have no figures on the relative value of robes as compared with whiskey, but our data show that whiskey was highly valued by the Gros Ventres.[15]

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So far as we have been able to find out, while the trade with the whites was carried on at every possible opportunity, the amount of intertribal exchange was relatively slight. Perhaps intertribal gambling contests would account for most of it. Coming Daylight remembers, however, one case where a Crow friend of her maternal uncle's offered him a race horse in exchange for elk teeth sufficient to trim a woman's dress. We lack details on other outside exchanges, but our informants mentioned that the Gros Ventres used to obtain abalone shells from the Nez Percé and also occasionally camas roots, but this latter was very rare. Denig mentions the abalone shell was earlier worth $20 (i.e. 6-7 robes), but that when the traders brought in so many their value dropped to $10.[16]

The head of the household was the one who bargained with the trader, but the materials he took in exchange were supposed to have been decided upon in view of the needs of the household as well as his own personal needs. If, for instance, one of his

credited as follows: 30 lbs. of dried meat, 1 robe; 2 red fox skins, 1 robe; 1 large raw elk skin, 1 robe; 12 wolf skins, 4 robes.

[14] Denig, p. 420.

[15] Several of the traders remark that the Gros Ventres did not beg for whiskey as did the Piegan and others, but they were willing to pay for it. See Henry, v. 2, p. 734.

[16] Denig, pp. 590-91.